

THE CRESSONS AND THE AMERICAN ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Roger W. Fuester¹

ABSTRACT: A brief history is presented summarizing the contributions of Ezra T. Cresson, Sr., hymenopterist (1838-1925), and his two sons, George B. Cresson, general naturalist and formicidologist (1859-1919) and Ezra T. Cresson, Jr., dipterist (1876-1948), to the science of entomology and to The American Entomological Society. This talk was given at the society's 125th anniversary meeting on February 15, 1984.

If there were ever to be a "first family" of The American Entomological Society, it most certainly would have to be the Cresson family, because Ezra Townsend Cresson, Sr. and his two sons, George Bringham Cresson and Ezra Townsend Cresson, Jr., contributed a great deal to the society.

Logically, the story begins with E. T. Cresson, Sr., who, according to his biographer, the renowned odonatist Philip P. Calvert (1928), was born at Byberry, Bucks Co., Pennsylvania on June 18, 1838. Little is known of his childhood other than that he attended Philadelphia public schools through grammar school (eighth grade), but didn't go to high school. Evidently, he was obliged to work for the support of his mother, and during the late 1850's, was employed as a clerk for the Pennsylvania Railroad.

The year 1859 was an important one for the young (21-yr.-old) Cresson for several reasons. To begin with, in February of that year, together with James Ridings and George Newman, he founded The Entomological Society of Philadelphia, the name of which was changed to The American Entomological Society in 1867. He was also elected its first recording secretary.

In March of the same year, he married Mary Ann Ridings, daughter of one of the society's co-founders. They later had five children, one girl and four boys, two of which had an active interest in entomology and became valued members of the society.

On May 8, still in 1859, Ezra Cresson resigned from the society and with his young wife, his brothers John, Elliott, and Jacob and their families, left for New Braunfels, Comal County, Texas, where they pooled their resources in a cattle ranch. This venture did not work out, however, and Cresson returned to Philadelphia and appeared again at the society on October 24. That day marked the beginning of 65 years of continuous service to The American Entomological Society. One final note concerning 1859: he was also elected corresponding secretary of the society, in which capacity he served for 16 years (1859-1874).

¹Research Entomologist, Beneficial Insects Research Laboratory, Agric. Res. Serv., USDA, Newark, DE 19713. Recording Secretary, The American Entomological Society.

In 1861, he began the series of publications on the Hymenoptera of North America which was to earn him international recognition as a specialist on that order. This series, consisting of catalogs, synopses, and monographs, numbered 66 papers and was summarized in a comprehensive publication entitled *Synopsis of the Families and Genera of the Hymenoptera of America North of Mexico* in 1887.

Throughout his association with the society, Cresson played a significant role in the publication of the society's journals. From August 1865, to October 1866, he edited *The Practical Entomologist* which was the first journal dealing with economic entomology published in the United States. Unfortunately, the journal was only published for two years because of insufficient financial support. (It was distributed gratuitously and could not attract sufficient advertisers.) In Cresson's (1909) history of the society (which incidently was read 75 years ago tonight at the society's 50th anniversary meeting), he expressed the opinion that "The time had not yet come for the agricultural public to realize the value of such knowledge."

In 1871, he became editor of the *Transactions of The American Entomological Society*. He served as editor of this, the Society's longest running serial publication, until 1912, a period of 42 years. In 1889, working in conjunction with the Entomological Section of the Academy, he was instrumental in the establishment of the journal *Entomological News*. Finally, in 1916, he published, as the first number of the *Memoirs of The American Entomological Society*, a paper entitled *The Cresson Types of Hymenoptera*. This paper, which listed 2737 species, gave a list of Cresson's entomological writings arranged chronologically and numbered consecutively so as to facilitate location of a paper in which a given type was described. Thus we see that he contributed, in one way or another, to all of the society's publications.

From 1866 to 1874, Cresson served as curator of the society. Basically, this job included conducting the day-to-day business of the society, serving as custodian of society property, and performing much of the press work and composition of publications. In 1901, Cresson donated his own extensive collection (2367 types, 3511 species, and 87,775 specimens) of Hymenoptera to the society.

It should be noted that Ezra T. Cresson, Sr. never worked professionally as a scientist, curator, or teacher, but that his entomological studies were pursued as an avocation, while he was engaged in a full-time business career, the greater part of which was spent at Franklin Fire Insurance Company, where he worked for 41 years (1869-1910). This fact, coupled with his lack of formal training in biology, makes his long and laborious service to our society and his contributions to the taxonomy of Hymenoptera all the more noteworthy. Because Cresson was obliged to do his taxonomic work at night under gas-light, it led to partial failure of his eyesight, which

prematurely ended his taxonomic work in 1887 at the age of 49. This unfortunate event did not appear to diminish his enthusiasm for the work of the society because in addition to continuing on as editor of *Transactions*, he also served as treasurer of the society from 1874 to 1924, a period of 50 years. When his letter requesting that he be relieved of his duties as treasurer was read at the society meeting held October 23, 1924, the following resolution carried unanimously:

"The American Entomological Society hears, with deep regret, the letter from the Treasurer, Mr. E. T. Cresson, . . . requesting that he be relieved of his office. This Society looks on Mr. Cresson as its founder. It recalls the sixty-five years which he devoted to its welfare as a member of its Publications Committee, as Editor of its *Transactions* and as Treasurer, the last for fifty consecutive years. His services have been given without salary or pecuniary reward. In acceding to Mr. Cresson's request, this Society desires to place upon record its appreciation of his unselfish and untiring labors in its behalf, its pride in his long connection with the Society and in his numerous contributions to entomology and its best wishes that he may long remain with us as our most honored member."

On March 26, 1925, he was selected the first honorary member of The American Entomological Society. He continued to visit the society's rooms up until a few months before his death. He passed away on April 19, 1925, in his 88th year, at the home of his son, E. T. Cresson, Jr., in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

George B. Cresson, first-born child of Ezra T. and Mary Ann Cresson, was the second Cresson to be associated with The American Entomological Society. He was born in Philadelphia on November 15, 1859. There is not much information available on G. B. Cresson, and most of my material was obtained from minutes of society meetings and the obituary written by Calvert (1920). His name first appeared in the minutes for the meeting held December 8, 1879, as part of a marginal insertion reading, "George B. Cresson, proposed for Resident Membership of the Society at the meeting June 9, 1879, was duly elected." He was also elected society curator for 1880 at that same December meeting. From 1880 to 1881 and from 1886 to 1889, he was also the conservator of the entomology section of the academy. According to Calvert (1920), George B. Cresson resigned from the society in 1883 but was re-elected "to full membership" at the meeting held December 12, 1887. During the intervening years, 1883-1886, he printed volumes XI-XII of the society's *Transactions* and was listed frequently as a visitor at society meetings. It was at his recommendation that the society purchased a press "sufficiently large to print four (4) pages

of the *Transactions* (sic) at one impression" (AES minutes XII-8-1884). Apparently, Mr. Cresson was being reimbursed for his services as printer and resigned so as to preclude any possibility of a conflict of interest arising. In any case, upon re-election to the society, he was elected society curator and served in that capacity for two years (1888-89).

According to Calvert (1920), it was during 1886-87 that G.B. Cresson aided him (Calvert) in his early entomological pursuits and advised him to specialize in some order other than Lepidoptera or Coleoptera.

G.B. Cresson was a general naturalist, but was especially interested in ants of which he formed a representative collection. However, he apparently never published any entomological papers.

After leaving the custodial position with the academy in 1889, he also went to work in the insurance business, first at Franklin Fire Insurance Company (where his father worked) and later at People's National Fire Insurance Company. He served as society librarian from 1892 to 1896 and remained a member of the society until his death on October 18, 1919.

Ezra T. Cresson, Jr., the third member of the family to work in entomology, was born in Philadelphia on December 18, 1876. From 1896 to 1898, he attended the Drexel Institute of Technology where he took courses in mechanical drawing, mechanics, shop work, and machine construction, but did not receive a degree or diploma. Upon leaving school, he was employed by the George T. Cresson Company, the Morse Elevator Works, and the Otis Brothers and Company (following their takeover of Morse).

He joined the Society in 1905 and became a member of The Academy of Natural Sciences in the same year. In 1906, he became librarian of the society, a position he held for 42 years (until 1947) and also published his first entomological paper entitled *Some North American Diptera from the Southwest. Paper I. Ortalidae*.

Late in 1907, E.T. Cresson, Jr. went to California and was admitted to the University of California in January, 1908, as a special student in the College of Natural Sciences. He attended for one semester taking courses "primarily in entomology."

He returned from the west later that year, and took up residence in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, where he lived the rest of his life. During the same year, he took a position with the academy as an assistant to the board of curators. In 1925, he was promoted to assistant curator of entomology and remained in that position until he retired in 1945. Thus, we see that E. T. Cresson, Jr. was the only member of the family to receive any formal training in entomology and to work as an entomologist for his livelihood.

During his productive career, he published widely (144 titles) on the Diptera, but was most interested in the family Ephydriidae, the shore flies.

In his biography of E.T. Cresson, Jr., Calvert (1949) published the following excerpt from a memorandum prepared by Cresson several years before his death, giving a summary of his work on the Ephydriidae:

"When the study began, 1908, the Academy's collection contained 5 species, 12 specimens. At the present it contains about 600 species, 340 of which have been described as new, (and) over 8,000 specimens. The North American series contains over 275 species. Over 26,000 specimens have been examined and determined during this study. This collection is the largest in the world and contains about 75% of the known species."

Dr. Calvert (1949) also noted that Cresson "devoted much time and thought to doing all sorts of things, accumulating many devices for rapid mechanical manipulation." Cresson wrote two papers on mounting micro-Diptera and designed the very useful pinning forceps which bear his name.

In addition to serving the society as librarian, E. T. Cresson, Jr. was also corresponding secretary for 19 years (1909-11, 1932-47), treasurer for three years (1926-28), and vice-president for one year (1947). Like his father, he played an important role in the society's publications. He was elected associate editor of *Ent. News* in 1910, and remained on its editorial staff until his death. Moreover, he edited both *Transactions* and the *Memoirs* from 1927 to 1945 (19 years.)

In recognition of his more than 40 years of service to the society, he was elected an honorary member in 1947. E. T. Cresson, Jr. died at Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, on April 8, 1948. In his will, he left the society the sum of \$1,000 "to establish an Ezra T. Cresson Library Fund, the income from which is to be used for binding, repairs, and other preservation of the entomological books and pamphlets owned by the society." (The present balance of this fund is ca. \$25,000.)

In summing up, it is clear that the Cressons provided indispensable services to The American Entomological Society during its first 100 years. It is curious that none of the Cressons ever served as president of the society, especially in view of their obvious abilities and devotion to AES. In his biography of E.T. Cresson, Sr., Calvert (1928) remarks that "He steadfastly declined nomination as president, to which office his fellow members would gladly have elected him." Perhaps E.T. Cresson, Sr. and his sons were merely modest gentlemen. In any case, their industry and dedication stand as examples to all of us.

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SOCIETY MEETING OF APRIL 18, 1984

Dr. Veronica Dougherty, research associate in the Department of Entomology and Applied Ecology at the University of Delaware, was the speaker at the fifth regular meeting of The American Entomological Society. Eleven members and two guests attended her talk entitled "Systematics of Ectrichodiinae: a subfamily of Reduviid Bugs."

In the New World there are about 30 genera and 150 species of Ectrichodiinae. These large and colorful bugs are largely restricted to the tropics with only two species, *Rhiginia cinctiventris* and *R. cruciata*, known this far north. The subfamily is characterized by a bifurcated posterior margin of the scutellum in all but a few species, and fused abdominal segments. The presence of scent glands, sexual dimorphism, apparent aposematic mimicry complexes, and a variety of head morphologies suggest an interesting biology. The example of one African species that has been observed to track down and feed on millipedes seems to be one of the few observations of behavior made on the group. Old World Ectrichodiinae include a number of iridescent species, some species where males are brachypterous, and other species where females have hairy basal antenna segments. These characteristics are unknown in New World species of the group. Other comparisons indicate that New World Ectrichodiinae are polyphyletic.

In notes of local entomological interest, Charles Mason reported his recent discovery in northern Delaware of a full-grown, overwintering, black cutworm larva, *Agrotis ipsilon*. In the midwest this species usually does not overwinter.

Harold B. White
Corresponding Secretary